

Take Students across the USA with Music

Mountain majesties and rolling rives have inspired composers for centuries. Why not your students? Help them make cross-curricular connections when you explore how composers

- may be inspired by natural beauty or
- draw from a region’s indigenous music, instruments, and dances.

Classroom Resource

The Virginia Chamber Orchestra (VCO) worked with an NPR music critic and a geography professor to create online resources for music teachers. Its online video, *Wonders of Geography: A Music Atlas of America*, covers five regions of the United States, focusing on the Grand Canyon, Mount St. Helens, the Mississippi River, the Appalachian Mountains, and the agricultural region called the Black Belt.

Lesson Plans

In addition to the VCO Student Activity Guide

[www.virginiachamberorchestra.org/wonders_of_geography.pdf],

two MENC members developed lesson plans based on *Wonders of Geography*:

- Cynthia Carlton developed a 4-part lesson plan that uses the VCO online video. Her lessons cover a wide range of learning:
 - geographic influence on music
 - different genres of music (suite, symphony, hymn, etc.)
 - what a chamber orchestra is
 - composing

See her lesson, *Geography and Music—Making a Connection* in MENC’s My Music Class. [<http://www.menc.org/lessons/view/958/>]

“These lessons for 5th and 6th grade students incorporate critical listening skills and the development of musical vocabulary, including tempos, dynamics, and expression. It has been my teaching style to connect music with student understanding of their world, so the creation of these lessons was right up my alley! Kudos to the VCO for providing this resource, which creates a marvelous musical link to US geographical features.”

- Debra Lindsay developed four lessons with a variety of activities that focus on “Simple Gifts” from Aaron Copland’s *Appalachian Spring*. Her lessons have students singing, dancing, playing recorder, and performing an Orff arrangement.

See her lessons:

- *Wonders of Geography—A Musical Atlas of America* [<http://www.menc.org/lessons/view/952/>]
- Let’s Play “Simple Gifts” on Our Soprano Recorders [<http://www.menc.org/lessons/view/953/>]
- A Simple Dance to “Simple Gifts” [<http://www.menc.org/lessons/view/954/>]

- “Simple Gifts” Orff Arrangement [<http://www.menc.org/lessons/view/955>]

Lindsay suggests pulling the series together in a grand performance with some students dancing and singing and others performing individual parts on the Orff instruments and recorder. She wrote the Orff parts “so that teachers can choose a few for accompaniment and still provide a good learning experience. I can also envision the ‘Simple Gifts’ arrangement being used for choral concerts or festivals.” She recommends expanding the instrumental parts to accommodate a large choral ensemble, e.g., 8-10 of each instrument to accompany a 600-member choral ensemble.

Lindsay has also written lesson plans for the VCO’s series on *The Musical Side of Thomas Jefferson*.

“In a time when funds are short,” Lindsay says, “the VCO has provided another resource for elementary/middle school general music and choral teachers.”

Visit the VCO website [<http://www.virginiachamberorchestra.org/>] to take advantage of the video and the student resources [www.virginiachamberorchestra.org/wonders_of_geography.pdf].

—Linda C. Brown, April __, 2011, © MENC: The National Association for Music Education (menc.org)